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Can Frege's *Farbung* Help Explain the Meaning of Ethical Terms?

Abstract

In this paper we reach back to an earlier generation of discussions about both linguistic meaning and moral language to answer the still-current question as to whether and in what way some special non-descriptive feature comprises part of the semantics of identifiably ethical terms. Taking off from the failure of familiar meta-ethical theories, restricted as they are to the Fregean categories of Sense and Force (whether singly or in combination), we propose that one particular variety belonging to Frege's humble semantic category of *Farbung* — what Dummett calls Tone — holds the key. Specifically, the kinds of expressions that Dummett dubs “expressives”, when properly understood as representing a speaker's sentiment, solve the mystery not only of moral discourse, but of evaluative language, broadly construed. On this basis we account for moral language's special relation to action motivation in ways that avoid Moore's paradox and honor, in unasserted contexts, what Geach calls ‘the Frege point’. Commitments to the public and social character of natural language are also respected.

Introduction

That there is an elusive ingredient mixed up with the meanings of identifiably ethical expressions has by now become something of an institutionalized opinion. Not only ‘good’ and ‘evil’ and ‘righteous’, but such terms as ‘brave’, ‘coward’, and ‘liar’ are commonly said to be morally loaded. And so, too, with a cluster of other expressions, as for example those constitutive of aesthetic discourse. Each of the leading meta-ethical accounts has its shortcomings. Something that heretofore has not been made explicit, however, is the fact that these analyses of moral language are couched in terms that can usefully be understood as exemplifying the Fregean framework of sense and force within the theory of meaning. This is a matter of some significance. On the one hand, either this ingredient is identified entirely with Fregean sense or with one or another utterance force; other analyses, on the other hand, mark the Fregean distinction, not by favoring one or the other exclusively, but by dividing up the meaning into these two components. Twentieth-century accounts adhere to this pattern: descriptivism, subjectivism, emotivism, prescriptivism, and the much-discussed distinction between “thick” and “thin” ethical concepts. In this paper we propose an alternative: that the vastly overlooked feature of natural language that Gottlob Frege dubbed *Farbung* (coloring)¹ — what Michael Dummett calls ‘tone’ — possesses explanatory value with respect to the semantics of ethical and related forms of discourse. To date, this possibility has been entirely overlooked. We have no intention of attempting a thorough analysis of tonality here; rather, we focus on one particular variety of tone — namely, the “expressive” — and investigate the extent to which it lends itself to an important theoretical role.

In Section 1 we review the distinctions between sense and force and between sense and tone, compile a complete list of the varieties of tone found in the writings of Frege and Dummett, and survey the general characterizations of tonality respectively proposed. In Section 2 we examine two specific tonal varieties — expressives and evocatives — examples of derogatory or obscene language, and in light of their “attitude-conveying” character suggest their relevance for meta-ethics. In Section 3 we examine ways in which appeals to the sub-categories of tone upon which we have focused better resolve questions about the “action-guidingness” of moral language as these have been pursued by Bernard Williams and Simon Blackburn, especially. The key question here is: To what extent is the “attitude-conveying” (tonal) element of expressives also found in moral language? In particular the importance of their occurrence in unasserted contexts is highlighted.

1. Varieties of Tone

Sense, force, and tone. As Dummett puts it, these are the three ‘ingredients’ that Frege recognizes as belonging to our general notion of linguistic meaning. That Frege himself does not put it quite this way — he evidently never employs a word for our intuitive notion of meaning, reserving the German word *Bedeutung* for a more specialized use associated with the object referred to, or meant — warrants no quibble. From his earliest writings Frege explicitly acknowledges there is more to natural language, to its sentences in particular, than the expression of thoughts (propositions) and the force with which they are uttered.²

The sense of a word is that part of its meaning that makes a difference to the truth or falsity of sentences in which it occurs. It is defined by Frege as the “mode of presentation” of its referent — the precise way in which the object is given to us (1892b). The sense of a sentence, what Frege calls ‘the thought’, is also defined in terms of a mode of presentation — the way in which the truth or falsity of a sentence taken as a whole is determined. This is characterized by Frege (and subsequent philosophers, such as Donald Davidson) as an association with objective truth-conditions. Force, then, has to do with the various uses to which truth-evaluable propositions can be put by actual speakers: a thought can be asserted, queried, or enjoined, for example. This way of explaining meaning can be illustrated by the following group of utterances:

“Jones is saved.”
 “Is Jones saved?”
 “Save Jones!”

According to Frege and Dummett, these three utterances share a propositional core; they differ only with respect to utterance-force. For Dummett, the underlying semantic form is rendered transparent by canonical forms of expression employed by a systematic theory of meaning. These three utterances are represented respectively thus:

It is the case –that Jones is saved (schematically: |- p)
 Is it the case –that Jones is saved (? p)
 Make it the case –that Jones is saved (! p)

Utterance force — assertoric, interrogative, imperative — is generally marked by such public linguistic elements as word order, verbal mood (indicative, subjunctive, or imperative), and

intonation contour, and can be characterized in terms of speakers' beliefs and desires.

Aside from force, then, any aspect of an individual word's use that does not contribute to the determination of reference comprises its coloring, shading, or fragrance. For Dummett, this "rag-bag" category, as he describes it, defies any single, unified characterization. We will follow him in calling it 'tone'.

So, what are Frege's examples of tonality? *Begriffsschrift* contains the example of passive versus active sentence construction. Here, too, we first encounter Frege's distinction between 'and' and 'but', as well as his example of sentence pairs involving an interchange of dative and nominative: sentences where, e.g., 'receive' replaces 'give', or 'lighter' replaces 'heavier' (1879:§7 and §9, respectively). 'Logic' contains a discussion of several examples in which "a sentence does more than express a thought and assert its truth" (1897:139). Here Frege locates such seemingly disparate elements as onomatopoeia (including such features as sounds of words, tone of voice, intonation, and rhythm), differences among the family 'walk', 'stroll' and 'saunter', and between pejorative 'cur' and its neutral relative 'dog'. Here, too, we find the words 'ah' and 'unfortunately' — the former used as an interjection, the latter as a sentence adverb — and again the active-passive and dative-nominative transformations. Frege's letter to Husserl of 30 October-1 November 1906 also contains a reference to the coloring and illumination of a thought as being that which remains after sense is subtracted, though no further examples are given (1906b:101-105; unfortunately, Husserl's reply of 10 November is lost, part of which reportedly dealt with 'equivalent sentences and "coloring"'). Finally, in 'The Thought', the last surviving writing in which he discusses this topic, Frege cites the interjections 'alas' and 'thank God', the differences between 'horse', 'steed', 'cart-horse' and 'mare', the adverbs 'still' and 'already', and dative-nominative exchange (1918:22-23). Frege also mentions the sense-tone distinction in 'A brief Survey of my logical Doctrines' (1906a), but gives no further examples. As far as we can determine, this constitutes a complete list of Frege's examples of tonality.

We will consider possible additions to this list, but want first to examine the characterizations, over and above the negative criteria, that Frege offers for tonality. In 'Logic', immediately following his distinction between the 'three levels of difference', he characterizes tonality as being both mental and subjective:

With respect to the first level, it is to be noted that, on account of the uncertain connexion of ideas with words, a difference may hold for one person, which another does not find. The difference between a translation and the original text should properly not overstep the first level. To the possible differences here belong also the coloring [*Farbung*] and shading [*Beleuchtung*] which poetic eloquence seeks to give to the sense. Such coloring and shading are not objective and must be evoked by each hearer or reader according to the hints of the poet or speaker (1897:30-31).

As Dummett points out, Frege's portrayal of tonality as a matter of subjective associations with mental images is unsatisfactory (1981a:85-88, 1991:122). Talk of mental images is out of place with examples of tone that Frege himself gives, e.g., the pair 'and' and 'but', active versus passive sentence construction, and pairs like 'dog' and 'cur'.

Moreover, *if* tonality is an ingredient of meaning, then supposing meaning is objective, it follows

that tonality must be also. If any aspect of an expression's meaning is subjective, the meaning of whole sentences in which it occurs must therefore also be subjective, at least in part. That meaning is in part subjective accords with what Frege says in some places; yet it is inconsistent with his broad view of the objectivity of interpreted languages, and should be regarded as a defect. If an individual speaker somehow comes to associate with the application of a particular expression a set of conditions different from that which other speakers of the language standardly associate with it, then if this idiosyncratic association is sufficiently constant, it can be recognized by others. Her audience can adjust themselves to the deviation; i.e., they can understand her *idiolect*. On the other hand, if the supposedly subjective associations are not constant — if say, the same word calls up different mental images or idiosyncratic associations on each occasion — then there is no reason even to suppose that this individual knows what she herself means. For in this case there are no grounds for speaking of a meaning at all (cf. Dummett, 1981a:85; Frege says in 'Logic' (1897), "Even with the same man the word 'horse' does not always conjure up the same idea").

Frege seems to think of tone as having specially to do with poetry or poetic language. In many places he characterizes tone as a poetic fragrance that attaches to certain expressions. In the passage from 'On Sense and Reference', Frege remarks that "to the possible differences [in mental images] belong also the coloring and shading which poetic eloquence seeks to give to the sense." In 'Logic' he says,

In many cases a sentence is meant to have an effect on the ideas and feelings of the hearer as well; and the more closely it approximates to the language of poetry, the greater the effect is meant to be (1897:139).

The natural interpretation yields a picture of language as stretched between two basic models of expressions. On one side is a purely logical model science aims to emulate: language which is to a maximal degree free of ambiguities, vagueness, empty terms, and the like, wherein nothing is left to 'hints' and 'guesswork'. On the other side is poetic language, embodying all the ills just mentioned, whose key function seems to consist primarily in an ability to call forth mental images and feelings in speakers and hearers. As Frege says in 'The Thought',

An indicative sentence often contains, as well as a thought and the assertion, a third component over which the assertion does not extend. This is often said to act on the feelings, the mood of the hearer or to arouse his imagination.

. . . Such constituents of sentences are more noticeably prominent in poetry, but are seldom absent from prose. They occur more rarely in mathematical, physical, or chemical than in historical expositions. What are called the humanities are more closely connected with poetry and are therefore less scientific than the exact sciences which are drier the more exact they are, for exact science is directed toward truth and only the truth. Therefore all constituents of sentences to which the assertive force does not reach do not belong to scientific exposition but they are sometimes hard to avoid, even for one who sees the danger connected with them. Where the main thing is to approach what cannot be grasped in thought by means of guesswork these components have their justification (1918:22-23).

Frege might be excused for such a crude picture, since his overriding interest was in setting up a formal language suitable for the purposes of natural science; but as an account of natural language

and of the tonal aspect of certain expressions, this obviously will not do. Frege extends this characterization not only to expressive interjections such as ‘alas’ and ‘thank God’, and (perhaps more plausibly) to the difference between ‘horse’ and ‘steed’; but, curiously, he brings it to bear on the difference between active and passive voice: “As a rule stylistic and aesthetic reasons will give the preference to one of them” (1897:141).

This leaves us with Frege’s talk of ‘hints’ (Anspielung) and ‘hinting’ (andeuten). Possibly, this is meant to provide a more general characterization than the poetic, insofar as Frege often seems to couch the latter in terms of the former: the poet furnishes only hints, which provide the impetus for her hearers themselves to form their own images. That Frege also explains the difference between ‘and’ and ‘but’ in terms of hinting might support this reading. For Frege, ‘but’ hints that what follows is different from what one would expect. But both Dummett and Bede Rundle provide examples where what follows ‘but’ is just what would be expected given its preceding clause. Consider: ‘It’s only an imitation, but it’s cheaper than the real thing’. Dummett nevertheless retains the idea of hinting, claiming that ‘but’ hints of some contrast, relevant to the context, between the two clauses, though not necessarily a contrast between what the second clause expresses and what one would expect (cf. 1981a:86 and Rundle, 1979:393-394).

In any case, Frege’s broad contention that whatever does not fall under the assertion sign is thus a matter of tonality naturally allows this characterization. Whatever is not asserted can only be hinted at, suggested, indicated, or ‘implied’. Frege describes the use of ‘still’ and ‘already’ in just this way:

With the sentence ‘Alfred has still not come’ one really says ‘Alfred has not come’ and, at the same time, hints that his arrival is expected, but it is only hinted. It cannot be said that, since Alfred’s arrival is not expected, the sense of the sentence is therefore false (1897:23).

With only a little ingenuity (exercising different uses of negation, for instance) it can be shown that, contra Frege and Dummett, such words are not tonal. In many contexts they will make a difference with respect to truth and falsity.³ As for the idea of ‘hinting’, this is unsatisfactory as a general characterization of the meaning contribution of any lexical item. Naturally, ‘hint’ cannot simply be substituted for ‘not asserted’, or for ‘whatever the force does not extend over’, which would amount to an empty exchange. For Frege, what is hinted is what can only be *guessed* at. Yet, when a speaker uses ‘but’, she does not merely ‘hint’ that she has some contrast in mind. Assuming its correct use, a competent hearer *knows* this to be the case: use of this word gives a clear and unambiguous signal to this effect. It conveys information to the hearer, albeit implicitly. The same holds with ‘still’ and ‘already’. It is no guessing game between speaker and hearer as to whether the speaker possesses a particular expectation.

One can observe the same behavior in e.g., sentence adverbs: a sincere utterance of ‘Hopefully, Tony Blair will soon cease parroting George W. Bush’ does not merely hint, in Frege’s sense, that the speaker hopes for Blair’s independence of mind; it conveys this information clearly. Similarly, if a speaker calls some dog a cur, or some black woman a nigger, or exclaims, “Thank God!”, we know very well what her attitude is in each particular case — at least she represents herself as possessing the particular attitude. Neither is our knowledge *inferential*, if this is taken to entail the possibility of a gap in our reasoning where we might go wrong. We can doubt the sincerity with

which she speaks, but the meaning of her words is clear. Talk of hinting and guessing gives us no grip on tonality and meaning.

So, how many different kinds of tone are there? From the writings of Frege and Dummett fifteen distinct varieties can be distinguished (additions to Frege's can be found at Dummett 1981a:85-88 and 1991:122). In our view, however, not all of these genuinely belong, and among those that do, arguably not all are a matter of *meaning*. The kinds of tonality cited by Frege and Dummett are exemplified by the following list of pairs.

- (1) Scott wrote *Waverley* : *Waverley* was written by Scott
- (2) Sally loaned me £10 : I borrowed £10 from Sally
- (3) We forgot to warn you : Sadly, we forgot to warn you
- (4) Liz opposes the war : Liz still opposes the war
- (5) and : but
- (6) torch : flashlight
- (7) cheekbone : zygoma
- (8) dog : doggie
- (9) before : ere
- (10) dead : deceased
- (11) perspiration : sweat
- (12) walk : stroll
- (13) onomatopoeic words: buzz, boing, clank, etc.
- (14) defecate : shit
- (15) Chinese : Chink

In the remainder of this paper we will focus our attention on the last two types, exemplified by (14) and (15).

2. Setting the stage: expressives, evocatives, and the linguistic representation of attitudes

Familiar inadequacies of descriptivism, subjectivism, emotivism, and prescriptivism lead us to seek a different account of the meanings of the kinds of expressions for which each purports to account. Similarities with what, following Dummett, we will call “expressives” (words like, e.g., ‘cur’, ‘Chink’, and ‘nigger’) and “evocatives” (words like, e.g., ‘shit’, ‘fuck’, and ‘cunt’) suggest that value language possesses an element of tone. An enticing hint to this effect might be extracted from a passing remark of Dummett's. In a passage on evocative expressions, Dummett speaks of certain expressions possessing ‘pathetic overtones’. According to Dummett, these are expressions semantically linked to the production in hearers of a feeling of pathos:

The evocative use of language is quite different [from the expressive use]: here the primary purpose is not necessarily fulfilled by the hearer's recognition of the intention underlying the selection of the words. For instance, words may be used with the intention of arousing in the hearers a sense of pathos: this is, of course, in part a matter of the content of what is said — of their sense, in Frege's technical use — but also in part depends on the manner of expression, i.e., on the tone of the words used. In order that the words should have the desired effect through their tone, it is necessary that the hearer's Impression of the tone should be one of pathos: if, for example, through

accident the words used have, for the hearer, comic or obscene associations, the utterance will have misfired. It will not be saved by the mere fact that the hearer is aware that these associations are private to himself, that the words are ordinarily taken as having pathetic overtones, and it was for this purpose that the speaker used them: for the primary purpose of the evocative use of language does not operate through the hearer's recognition of the speaker's intention, but through their effect in arousing in the hearer a mood or attitude. . . . The evocative use of language does, therefore, depend, in a way in which no other use of language does, upon the dispositions of the individual hearer to react in certain ways. But to conclude lightly from this that tone is always a subjective matter is wrongly to assimilate the expressive to the evocative use, and at the same time to overlook the fact that the two uses between them do not exhaust the function of tone . . . (1981a:88).

While we reject Dummett's individualistic and subjectivist account of the function of evocatives, it nevertheless occurs to us that if the evocation of *pathos* can be construed as 'a manner of speaking', i.e., as a matter of tonality, then it is no great stretch to so regard the expression or evocation of *ethos* — of semantically relevant conditions bound to favorable or unfavorable moral attitudes. — And in a way that encompasses the entire domain of human values. Frege's observation that *Farbung* serves in many cases to act upon hearers' moods and attitudes points us in the same direction.

As a start, consider what Frege says about the expression 'cur'. In 'Logic' he writes,

If we compare the sentences 'This dog howled the whole night' and 'This cur howled the whole night', we find that the thought [i.e., the propositional sense] is the same. The first sentence tells us neither more nor less than does the second. But while the word 'dog' is neutral as between having pleasant or unpleasant associations, the word 'cur' certainly has unpleasant rather than pleasant associations and puts us rather in mind of a dog with a somewhat unkempt appearance. Even if it is grossly unfair to the dog to think of it in this way, we cannot say that this makes the second sentence false. True, anyone who utters this sentence speaks pejoratively, but this is not part of the thought expressed (1897:140).

Frege is right about 'dog' and 'cur' not being strict synonyms. Likewise 'Chinese' and 'Chink'. We side with Frege and Dummett in viewing these differences as semantic. Where we part company with them has to do with Frege's restricted notion of informativeness⁴ and with Dummett's appeal to speaker intention and his deviation, in the case of evocative expressions, from a pattern of explanation that acknowledges the shared or social aspect of the associations governing their correct use.

In the passage above Frege speaks of 'thinking of the dog in this way'. This might bring to mind his construal of sense as 'the mode of presentation' of an object; but this is not what Frege has in mind here. This *way* of thinking of the dog corresponds to thinking of it *pejoratively*, not to some way of thinking of an object that determines it as that particular animal. And yet, this is perhaps not so obviously a stylistic matter either, thought of in the ways sketched earlier.

Following Dummett, we will call pejorative or derogatory terms 'expressive', since they serve not only to identify an object in a more-or-less 'neutral' way — e.g., as canine, or as Chinese — but

also to convey the speaker's attitude toward the referent. Notice that they conform nicely to dictionary usage labels: sub-categories such as *jocular*, *derogatory* and *offensive*. Notice, too, that these sub-categories belong to the broader class of stylistic, rather than dialectal, terms, even where the latter is expanded to encompass both 'geographical' and 'subject' (e.g., nautical, poetry, music, chemistry, medicine, etc.) expressions.

To be sure, there is a difference between the pair 'sweat' - 'perspiration', on the one hand, and 'Chinese' - 'Chink' on the other — the latter reflecting a difference between pejorative versus non-pejorative ways of speaking. Yet, the latter does not seem so clearly a matter of style. A formal or a polite style, yes; but a pejorative style? This is highly dubious. However, if we adopt the more general 'manner of speaking', there is little to quibble about in recognizing a class of 'expressive' terms as one variety of tone. What is important, semantically speaking, above and beyond a certain descriptive element, and what sets these expressions apart from our other tonal varieties, belongs primarily *on the side of the speaker*: such words convey the speaker's attitude toward the object or toward what she is saying. But although we can allow, without stretching things too far, that both differences are attributable to a *manner* of speaking, such a characterization does not by itself entail that differences between individual members of such pairs are in every case to be reckoned a difference in *meaning*. With respect to the above pairs, this is attributable only to the latter. One important difference between these pairs is that the latter, but not the former, enjoys a direct association with speakers' attitudes.

According to Dummett, "the expressive function is fulfilled as long as the hearer recognizes the attitude which it was the intention of the speaker to convey; it is irrelevant what feelings they evoke in the hearer" (1981a: 88). This gloss is intended to differentiate expressive from evocative terms; but as a general account of expressives it is at best misleading. Since the use of such words serves to express a speaker's attitude whether or not it is conveyed with conscious intention, speaker intention plays no part in the understanding of a speaker's words. Nevertheless, it is crucial to realize that correct use of expressives is still an epistemological — and objective — matter: the understanding of such language is bound up with hearers' (shared) recognitional abilities.

Incongruously, the passage just quoted appears to put the relation between the recognition of a speaker's attitude and the understanding of her utterance the wrong way around: it seems to suggest that we correctly understand the utterance, or more precisely in this instance, its expressivity, via a recognition of the speaker's attitude. As Dummett surely knows (and rightly says elsewhere), it is only insofar as we understand the words a speaker utters that we can identify the attitude that she conveys by their employment (Cf. 1981a: 233ff). An understanding of such words cannot be attributed to hearers on the basis of an *antecedent* recognition of an attitude that it is the function of the words themselves to convey.

Offensive terms, on the other hand, and possibly jocular ones as well, can be said to constitute 'evocative' expressions, being primarily associated with attitudes standardly evoked *in audiences* by their employment. This is not to say that considerable overlap between the two kinds of expression can never occur: an utterance like "You bastard!" might be associated with both sets of conditions. It is evocative in the sense that it can be counted on to provoke a characteristic audience reaction — intended or not — and at the same time it expresses the speaker's attitude toward the hearer. Similarly with 'Chink', 'Spic', 'nigger', and all other racial slurs, which are both derogatory and

offensive. Examples of non-racial words that can be regarded as both derogatory and offensive might include ‘poofter’, ‘wanker’, ‘twat’ and ‘bitch’ (as applied to a woman). With respect to tonality these and their ilk are of a kind — i.e., they possess the same tone. Clearly, all are words *for* different things; and differences among them impinge on sentential truth and falsity. Naturally, then, any common element of meaning belongs to the category of tone. This is not to say that even within the same tonal subclass there is no room for differences. Vulgar expressions possess varying degrees of strength, both with respect to the attitude of the speaker as well as to the feelings standardly evoked in hearers: cf. the British ‘blast’ and ‘sod’ — the latter being regarded as much the more vulgar and offensive of the two.

The notion of a ‘manner of speaking’ also fits the use of genuinely offensive expressions. If someone is regarded as having spoken in an offensive manner, it may be due to the content of the expressions used. That is, it may generally be regarded as offensive to state or imply that such-and-such is the case, where what is affirmed is felt to be excessively unkind, harsh, or distasteful. But sometimes the mere presence of certain words is objectionable. So-called ‘taboo’ words such as ‘damn’, ‘shit’, ‘bollocks’, or the stronger ‘fuck’ and ‘cunt’, can occur in unasserted contexts, and sufficiently many hearers can be counted on to take offense, just as when these words occur assertorically. But, as we shall see, when it comes to evocative terms, contra Dummett, there is no need to depart from the general pattern of explanation.

The semantics of expressive and evocative language is altogether not a simple matter. Choice of the term ‘cur’ is perhaps not the most favorable with which to begin an examination because, in addition to its possessing both derogatory and offensive characteristics, surely, as compared with ‘dog’, it possesses an additional element of ‘descriptiveness’. This is belied by Frege’s observation that use of the former may put us in mind of a dog *with an unkempt appearance*. Dictionaries give such characteristic features as ‘mongrel or inferior’, ‘mangy’, or ‘surly’, which, with the possible exception of the evaluative-sounding ‘inferior’, are to be counted among the truth-evaluable conditions to which the use of ‘cur’ is bound.

To articulate precisely what there may be to this word’s meaning over and above a descriptive content may not prove easy. To characterize a dog as inferior, for instance, evidently requires some kind of evaluation, and may be thought to involve more than the mere satisfaction of the defining characteristics. But while it may be pertinent to ask, “Inferior to whom, and according to what standard?”, this does not by itself carry the implication that ‘inferior’ is either subjective or non-truth-evaluable. If there is in place some agreed way of determining what standard applies in a given situation for this particular term, and if there also exists a means of settling whether or not, or to what extent, such standards are met, then it will be possible to correctly say that, as a matter of fact, a particular dog *is* inferior. Nor does it support the contention that the term ‘inferior’ by itself conveys any additional attitude on the part of the speaker toward the object in question, as a predicative occurrence in the antecedent of a conditional statement makes sufficiently clear.

Take ‘mongrel’. This looks to give us a better term for comparison. Among its descriptive conditions is that of mixed breeding, especially where this includes the additional factor of unknown ancestry. ‘Mongrel’ might be thought pejorative, just because possession of those characteristics is viewed by the bulk of the community as something contemptible. Likewise, the nouns ‘liar’ and ‘cheat’ possess clearly descriptive elements — easily characterizable within the Fregean framework — so that as a matter of fact someone either is or is not a liar or a cheat. But,

because we generally regard lying and cheating as deplorable, it may be felt that actually calling someone a liar or a cheat amounts to uttering a form of words which on their own express a distinctively pejorative attitude on the part of the speaker. Yet it is doubtful whether the meanings of ‘liar’ and ‘cheat’ contain any such additional, attitude-conveying element: although it may go against the grain of conventional social wisdom, no semantic paradox is involved in admitting that one does not condemn someone for lying or cheating. Compare this to other supposedly evaluative terms like ‘boring’, ‘delightful’, ‘funny’, ‘difficult’.

William Safire presents a word whose putative tone is solely of the pejorative variety:

. . . *revanche* is the French word for “revenge”, usually meaning the retaking of lost territory or return to old regimes. The word is always used pejoratively; if you are for economic revanchism, you eschew that word and say instead you favor retaliatory democracy or you’re a reciprocitist. *Revanche*, in diplomacy, is never admitted to be sweet (1993:16).

To the claim that an individual word by itself imparts an expressive or an evocative character to sentences in which it occurs, we must look to unasserted contexts. For example, both ‘If that revanchist succeeds, I’m leaving Mother Russia’ and ‘Does that revanchist drink vodka?’ appear to convey an unfavorable attitude toward the subject. However, it might be argued that this is not due solely to the presence of ‘revanchist’, but rather, is due to its occurring as grammatical subject, a form that might be supposed to impart on its own a kind of assertoric weight to sentences. Whether or not this is so, we can look to predicative forms. Consider ‘Are any of those new deputies revanchist?’ and ‘If a new deputy is revanchist, he’s bound to horde sable’. It might appear that any pejorative element is here stripped away. Clearly, one who utters these sentences does not thereby *assert* that anyone is a revanchist; nor does she speak pejoratively of any particular deputy, so how, it might be asked, could ‘revanchist’ contribute this character to these particular utterances? The correctness of these two points notwithstanding, a moment’s reflection suffices to show that simply by using ‘revanchist’ instead of a neutral equivalent the speaker conveys her contempt toward ‘things reciprocitist’.

Here, the condition ‘reciprocitists are contemptible’ is surely not a stylistic matter. But like the conditions ‘Blacks are contemptible’, or ‘Chinese are contemptible’, neither does it make any contribution to determining truth or falsity. Dummett gives as a passing example of a pejorative term the German Boche (1981b: 454). He says the condition for applying it to someone — the *grounds* for applying it — is that the person be of German nationality; and the *consequences* of its application are that he is barbarous and more prone to cruelty than other Europeans. Both conditions are involved in the meaning of the word, according to Dummett: neither could be severed without altering its meaning. The distinction between grounds and consequences here strikes us as dubious; but in any case, so far, these conditions put Boche on a par with ‘mongrel’, ‘liar’, and ‘cheat’. No mention is made of any other condition relating to the speaker’s attitude. For a genuinely expressive term, this feature is crucial. Although we said that this feature does not impinge on sentential truth or falsity, a speaker who calls someone a nigger or a Chink and then immediately adds that she does not hold them in contempt (on the basis of their race), voices a contradiction perfectly analogous to Moore’s paradox involving an assertion conjoined with a denial of belief.

3. Meaning through thick and thin

Our suggestion that moral terms exemplify a variety of *Farbung* requires an inquiry into the extent to which they behave like genuine expressives. In this connection, Williams's distinction between 'thick' and 'thin' moral terms bears revisiting (Williams, 1987:132-155).

Typically, meta-ethics has focused on general terms such as 'good', 'ought', and 'wrong', even though it is easily shown that such expressions are not confined to moral contexts. Examples such as 'This is a *good* hammer', 'She *ought* to advance a pawn', and 'We took a *wrong* turn back there' are advanced in support of a claim that, semantically speaking, nothing essentially or primarily moral attaches to such terms. Whether or not we discern in their actual uses anything that warrants assigning to them distinct moral senses, we occupy fairly safe ground if we regard such terms as falling within a broader class of expressions. After all, expressions usually associated with religious discourse are of the same general order — words such as 'righteous' and 'evil' — to which the notion of tone might equally apply. *Ceteris paribus*, the same holds for aesthetic discourse as well — for words such as 'beautiful' and 'ugly', for instance. In any case, in what follows we will sometimes speak of moral or ethical terms, utterances, or judgments, sometimes of *evaluative* ones. But nothing we say that bears on the applicability of tone hinges on prior acknowledgment of recognizably distinct subclasses of ethical, religious, or aesthetic expressions.

Aside from their respective difficulties, it is important to see that non-cognitivist accounts each portray the putative non-descriptive character of moral language as a variety of *speech-act* — whether this is given a performative gloss, an expressive gloss, or an imperative gloss.⁵ A serious problem besetting each variation turns on the inaptness of such construals for unasserted occurrences of moral terms — what Peter Geach calls 'the Frege point' (1972:254-255). Any imperative, performative, or (emotively) expressive force is cancelled in such contexts: in the antecedent of a conditional, for instance, or in a disjunctive clause. There is also Dummett's principle that force-indicators (signs for assertions, questions, commands, and the like) cannot meaningfully occur in antecedents of conditionals; more generally, they cannot be imbedded within the scope of other force-indicators (1981a:327-330). What we are claiming here is that the difficulties that these theories face result, not from their recognition of an additional element of meaning over and above what can be attributed to the Fregean sense of an expression, but from assigning such an element to the category of illocutionary- or utterance-*force*. At most, these theories acknowledge only two distinct classes of meaning ingredients. In light of Geach and Dummett, we need look to a third category to which this aspect of these thorny expressions might be assigned. With respect to a semantic theory modeled on the form of Frege's and Dummett's, if nothing else than by default we are left with tone.

The proposed distinction between 'thick' and 'thin' ethical concepts raises relevant questions, but does not preclude an analysis in terms of tone. Williams claims that traditional ethical theories go wrong when they pay insufficient attention to 'thick', or specific, ethical concepts, and focus instead mainly (if not exclusively) on the kinds of general, or 'thin', terms we mentioned at the beginning. Among thick ethical concepts, Williams cites 'treachery', 'promise', 'brutality', 'courage', 'coward', 'gratitude,' and 'lie' (1985:ch. 8).⁶ He concedes that thick concepts possess both world-guided and action-guiding characteristics; it is just that these cannot be prized apart into separate descriptive and non-descriptive components. (Though Williams nowhere explicitly says so, thin concepts

apparently possess only an action-guiding character.) On the basis of subsequent thinking, however, the consensus at this time appears to be that no substantive boundary can be drawn: differences between particular thick and thin ethical concepts look to be merely a matter of degree.⁷ Nevertheless, significant agreement, among descriptivists and nondescriptivists alike, has been reached on this fundamental point: so-called thick terms form part of the stock of moral or evaluative expressions. If this be so, then the claims — and the difficulties — associated with the familiar meta-ethical theories must hold with these terms as well.

As against Williams's claim concerning the inseparability of world-guided and action-guiding components, Blackburn offers the following thought on the difficulty in uncovering a descriptive form of words:

The main obstacle to finding a neutral extension for a term like 'courageous' or 'treacherous' is, of course, that the evaluative force feeds back to complicate or cloud the extension, particularly at the borders; one doesn't call it treachery unless one disapproves of it, but then there is limitless scope to worry whether one *should* in a particular case, in light of this or that. There is simply no argument from this complexity to refusal to separate the world-guided bits — features to which, in principle, a different attitude might be held (1986:199).

Blackburn may be correct in saying that one does not *call* someone a liar unless one disapproves of her. But the key question is whether this is a *semantically* relevant feature of such an utterance. In other words, is this feature a *defining* one? And even it is, the further question arises: Does this condition help define the lexical item itself, or does it rather distinguish the (speech-) *act* of calling someone 'a liar'? Furthermore, with respect to the supposed action-guiding feature, is there any significant difference between calling someone a liar and calling someone 'a person who tells falsehoods with an intention to deceive'?⁸

Blackburn claims that the evaluative or expressive element 'feeds back' and thus complicates the extension. By "feeds back", we understand Blackburn to mean that it is partly subjects' feeling of disapproval for certain acts that determines their extension. But it is far from obvious that all such terms possess a distinctly expressive element, i.e., an element that, *notwithstanding its expressive character*, cannot be wholly incorporated within a descriptive scheme. In the previous section, we remarked briefly on the use of expression 'to lie', and characterized its meaning in a way that, on the surface at least, descriptivists might find congenial. There we emphasized the connection between the apparent conveyance of expressivity, on the one hand, and on the other, calling someone a liar. We attributed the supposed expressiveness not to the meaning of the word, but to the fact that lying — i.e., telling a falsehood with an intention to deceive — is characteristically regarded with disapproval, as being morally repugnant. Were we too hasty? The crucial issue really has to do with whether this general attitude toward lying is to be understood as not merely contingently tied to the action, but as connected necessarily. In other words, does the attitude toward the telling of falsehoods with an intention to deceive itself form part of the concept of lying, in which case a more complete definition would require the specification that lying is a form of activity disapproved of by the social body?

This is akin to asking whether the evocative character of obscenities is a genuinely semantic

feature. Two points must be made here. First, an expressive ingredient resides, so to speak, with the speaker, versus an evocative ingredient, which is to be associated with the audience. So, for example, we claim that a hearer's feeling, reaction, or attitude towards a speaker's use of the word "fuck" is counted on as a matter of *conventional* expectation — i.e., it is not part of the explanation of the word's meaning. This tells against the semantic role Blackburn attributes to feedback. The (contingent) fact that telling falsehoods with the intention to deceive is widely and characteristically (even universally) met with disapproval is not the only possible motivation or reason a speaker might have for using one particular general term whose extension would be exactly the set of actions picked out by this description. So the meaning of the general term cannot contain as a necessary ingredient the attitude we just happen to feel.

The question seems to arise: Is this additional bit to be regarded as providing a further characterization of lying itself; or rather, by emphasizing how the community reacts to lying, does it thus serve to present only a contingent fact about the community? Or, is it that this further information specifies no more than a feature of one particular *use* that can be made of the term? In which case a correct formulation might look something like the following: "*W means* thus-and-so; in assertoric contexts specifically, *w* is *used* to convey such-and-such an attitude on the part of speakers, or (possibly) to evoke this attitude in hearers". And, exactly what is it, one may ask, that the community regards with disapproval? If the answer is "lying", then, contra Blackburn, it would appear that speakers *can* grasp the concept independently of knowing its connection to their attitude toward the telling of lies.

But consider now the sentence: 'Andy loves Betty'. Right or wrong, does it primarily characterize Andy, or does it instead characterize Betty, namely, as possessing the property of being loved by Andy? This question belies a misunderstanding — or so it is said: 'loves' does not function as a one-place predicate, representing a property possessed by some object. Rather, it signifies a two-place relation. Well, the original question might not be as bad as all that. Perhaps it simply presents a false dilemma. In any case, intuitively it strikes us as plausible that this characteristic attitude toward lying itself reflects just such a relational fact. Supposing this to be so, the question remains: Does such a relational fact about speakers and lying properly belong to the conditions with which the use and meaning of the term 'lying' are semantically governed?

The second point is this: It is sometimes claimed that the possibility of not disapproving of lying in particular instances shows that the connection is merely contingent. This is both misleading and mistaken. Animal protectionists might applaud Bertrand Russell, who saves the life of a hounded fox by lying to hunters about its whereabouts. This, however, does not show that animal protectionists do not as a rule disapprove of lying. At most, it can be surmised that other virtues — saving the life of an endangered animal, for instance — sometimes trump. Presumably, it is not Russell's lying that the protectionists approve of ultimately, but rather his attempt to preserve a fox's life.

More pertinent, possibly, are doubts about whether two distinct linguistic groups possess the same concept if they characteristically diverge on some aspect of the way in which they relate to whatever is signified by the concept term. So, for instance, both Alphans and Betans use the word 'lie' for the telling of falsehoods with an intention to deceive, but only Andy and members of his linguistic community regard this as morally wrong and react to the telling of lies in ways akin to our customs: they castigate offenders and tend to adopt a more skeptical attitude toward other of

their assertions. Betty and her community, on the other hand, do not so regard ‘lying’. For them it is simply a feature of socio-linguistic interaction to which they attach no particular moral significance. Any displeasure manifests itself in annoyance, say, with the consequences of being on the receiving end of a lie: you went to considerable trouble to prepare a special dinner, but no one who said they would come appeared. Betty does not generally regard liars or lying as the proper objects to which disapproval is to be directed. Perhaps she faults herself for the unwelcome consequences: perhaps she should not have believed the speaker in the first place.

Naturally, those who views Alphans’ (moral) stance as necessarily connected with the concept of lying must hold that either such a scenario as we have imagined is strictly impossible, or that Alphans and Betans simply do not possess the same concept. That is to say, that even though both Andy and Betty hold the statement “Jones lied” to be true, where both know that Jones told a falsehood with an intention to deceive, nevertheless, the word ‘lie’ does not possess the same meaning in the two languages. What they will disagree about, then, boils down to irreconcilable views concerning the correct application of the term.⁹ Maintaining the impossibility of our scenario above, on the other hand, one may yet claim, “Well, it may be possible for some other group to relate to lying in that way; but nevertheless, this is what *we* mean by it, this is what it means in *our* language.”

Now, in whatever way this question is ultimately to be answered, the primary problem has its locus within a community of speakers of a common language.¹⁰ Consider instead the statement, “Anyone who tells a falsehood with an intention to deceive is to be disapproved of.” Alphans, we take it, will respond exactly as before; in particular, they must regard this statement as *analytic*. It must for them be part of the very concept of ‘telling a falsehood with an intention to deceive’ that such an action is to be disapproved of. If this be so, then it appears that, *with respect to action-guidingness*, there is, after all, no difference between Alphans’ two concepts.

To return to the question: Does a relational fact about the speakers and lying properly belong to the conditions with which the correct application of the term ‘lie’ is governed? Let us suppose it does. But the picture we are given by each of the non-descriptivist theories is this: a word such as ‘lying’ has world-guided conditions *plus something else*. This “something else” is the word’s action-guiding conditions, characterized in terms of speakers’ attitudes toward (possession of) the world-guided feature. Now, if, as Blackburn says, one does not (correctly) call someone a liar on a particular occasion unless one disapproves of her having told a falsehood with an intention to deceive, the question is: Does this affect the truth and falsity of the utterance?¹¹

First, recall our Alphans: if speakers characteristically possess a particular attitude toward the world-guided, descriptively given, feature of a thick concept, then how can this attitude serve to distinguish the meaning of the two different forms of words? In fact, there is simply no room for differentiating them on this basis. Both “lying” and “telling a falsehood with the intent to deceive” express the attitude. Furthermore, if action-guidingness is thus analytically tied to the concept, then if one does not possess the relevant attitude, one simply cannot *say* that Hilary is in fact a liar. Moreover, she cannot *be* a liar (i.e., because she is not someone one disapproves of). Any claim to the contrary will thus fall prey to Moore’s paradox — indeed, will be implicitly self-contradictory. Therefore, any characterization that incorporates an action-guiding component which itself contributes to the identification of the concept thereby necessarily assigns this component a

descriptive, truth-evaluable role in the concept's meaning and use. So, where an expressive element "feeds back" to a descriptive one, both the thick term and its presumably attitudinally neutral intertranslatable description will express this attitude. If, on the other hand, this feature is not thus closely tied to the concept, then the concept is identifiable independently of it and the two must be regarded as detachable.¹²

Blackburn attempts to defend R.M. Hare against Williams's objection that thick terms have no detachable descriptive meaning, but his rescue fails. He says:

There is no reason to suppose that the world-based features are always elevated to the status of conventionally fixed, semantic rules — indeed, as the case of 'funny' shows, there is no reason for it to be generally known by the subjects which features of the world do the guiding (1986:199).

One problem here is that despite the inexplicitness that a word such as 'funny' might be thought to involve, it does not sever the connection to world-guided features. The fact, supposing it to be such, that speakers do not themselves know which features of the world do the guiding, is really beside the point. There is no call for them to be able to provide an explicit definition or account of the features of the world that guide its use. Rather, on the basis of actual usage, they may justifiably be accorded an implicit grasp of such conditions (Cf. Dummett 1981a:35, 65, 668ff and 1993:96, 131-33, 218-20). For make no mistake, with respect to the word's correct employment there exist some such conditions to which *in practice* they hold themselves and others liable (Cf. Rundle on speakers' unconscious and inarticulable grasp of the conditions associated with a difference in meaning between 'dreamt' and 'dreamed', 1991:69-70, 71-72ff) In this there is no difference between these and other words of their language. It is just that with some words the conditions governing their actual employment are not so difficult for native speakers to recognize, and thus to cite. The suggestion that these conditions need not be regarded as semantically determinate is entirely spurious.

Then have we just pulled the rug out from under our original proposal? Not at all. This discussion applies principally to the idea that the additional feature of thick concepts is an *action-guiding* one. What emerges thus far, then, is this: *If* there be such a feature, then it is one that descriptive as well as non-descriptive terms may possess. Furthermore, if it is not detachable in the way required by emotivism and prescriptivism, for example, then it contributes only to the sense of an utterance. On the other hand, if it is detachable, then it is not to be characterized as belonging to either the sense *or* the force of utterances. So the only plausible possibility still open is precisely the one relating to expressiveness — where the focus is on speakers, not hearers.

Finally, then, such expressions ought to be compared with members of the subclass of expressives introduced earlier. We have already shown that the 'Frege point' undermines the action-guiding characterization. Possibly it rules out an attitude-conveying element, as well (understood as falling under one or the other of two general types, derogatory or laudatory, and expressing either condemnation/disapproval or praise/approval). Be that as it may, the crucial point is this: expressions such as 'nigger', 'Chink', 'cur', 'dyke', 'male chauvinist pig', and 'Old Uncle Nose-up' retain their pejorative character even in unasserted contexts. And the same is true of the evocativeness (and expressiveness) of swearwords. Do thick concepts, or thin ones for that matter, behave like this? Can it rightly be said, for instance, that the question "Did you lie to your boss

about why you took the day off yesterday?” conveys any particular (moral or evaluative) attitude toward lying on the part of the speaker? — any more than does the question “Did you tell her a falsehood with the intention to deceive?” In particular, do we get a Moore-style paradox (“Sam is a liar, but I don’t disapprove of her for that”)? It is not so clear. A small sampling reveals that intuitions run both ways. A modest hope, then, is this: *If* a word has the capacity to convey a speaker’s unfavorable attitude toward lying in assertoric contexts, in a way that a neutral form of words does not, then it possesses this capacity in unasserted contexts as well. ‘Lying’ ought then to be regarded as a sort of (morally) pejorative term. However, if such words are felt not to directly convey such an attitude in unasserted contexts, this does not yet render a fatal blow to a claim that, nevertheless, such a condition is semantically *associated with* the correct employment of the word in these contexts.

We said that the question “Is she good?” is not to be recast as “Do I commend her?” An alternative might take the form of something along the lines of “Is she to be commended?” What can such a maneuver hope to accomplish? For one thing, if commendation, or the attitude thereof, does play a role in an understanding of the term ‘good’, then a connection to this role is preserved in unasserted contexts as well, and this is something the latter form makes clear.

Left at this, however, it will not do. Take ‘honesty’. If the statement “That child is frightfully honest” conveys a speaker’s laudatory sentiment toward a child on account of her being so truthful, it might be supposed capable of being paraphrased along the lines of “That child is frightfully truthful, which is to be commended”. Then the question, “Is that child completely honest?” could be recast as “Is that child completely truthful, which is to be commended?” The problem here, as with the gloss of the same form proposed earlier for pejoratives — ‘the x for which I feel contempt’ — is that the most natural reconstrual of this form portrays the relative clauses as straightforwardly assertoric. And, in this respect, the reconstrual seems to diverge from the original.

Recall the emphasis we placed on the idea of calling something by a particular label. We said that any expressiveness this conveys is attributable to *the act* of calling someone a ‘liar’, for instance. What we failed to add is that this connection to expressiveness is contained in the very concept of ‘calling something by some particular label’. Thus, even in unasserted contexts the use of such terms can be seen to draw on this primary notion. An utterance of the conditional ‘If she lies this time, I’ll never believe her again’ could be recast as ‘If she does what is called “lying” this time, . . .’, thus preserving a connection to the expressiveness associated with the notion of ‘calling someone a liar’. Rundle makes essentially this point in connection with ‘good’; crucially for our case, his formulation can be generalized to incorporate supposedly thick terms as well:

The equivalence between w and ‘what would be called w ’, or ‘what is called w ’, is generally unilluminating, but it is useful here as a reminder of how the central case reappears in the allegedly problematic departures from it . . . (1979:108-109).

In the end, it is not so much a matter of whether these words on their own, so to speak, impart an attitude, as whether or not they are, in a semantically definitive way, *associated with* such conditions, i.e., with particular attitudes. To express condemnation by using a pejorative term is to represent oneself as harboring a feeling of disapproval. Therefore, if there is such a thing as the expression of, or the evocation of, evaluative attitudes, this can best be accounted for in terms of Frege and Dummett’s supplementary category of tone. Specifically, we advert to the variety of

expressives — along the lines of the explanation we have given.

But does not such a close semantic tie with expressivity ultimately vindicate, or resurrect, one or another non-descriptivist theory? No, because of the inaptness of rendering the expressive element (a pejorative manner, say) as a particular species of illocutionary- or utterance-force. ¹³

Although we have been urging a view of evaluative expressions based in large part on similarities to expressive terms, there may yet be *some* differences between ethical terms and other expressives, such as derogatory words, which clearly retain an expressive character even in unasserted settings. And similarly with comparisons to evocatives. With respect to a putative action-guiding — or attitude-inducing — element, we contend that hearers do *not* react in any particularly characteristic ways to unasserted occurrences of either thick or thin terms. However, if a word itself does not impart to utterances such an audience-related coloring, this again might be explained by recourse to the idea of ‘calling something by a particular label’. Because, it is only insofar as a speaker or hearer actually *believes* that someone is a liar that an utterance to this effect provides her with a ‘reason for action’ in connection with this label. Assuming such an element to be incapable of assimilation without residue to a descriptive characterization, the same kind of analysis we sketched for expressive components might equally apply. As against this, however, it is simply not the case that the statement “Sam is the biggest liar on earth” standardly *evokes* in hearers an unfavorable attitude of any kind towards Sam. A hearer forms this attitude if and only if she accepts the statement as true; which means that she herself assents to it. The attitude thus resides solely on the side of a speaker. This supports the view, therefore, that ethical terms are not members of the subclass of evocatives. We draw the following distinction: evocatives *provoke* rather than *guide* action — the latter being understood as giving reasons for acting in a way that is rational and deliberative (cf. Williams, 129-30).

Our examination of the supposedly thick ethical concept of ‘liar’ or ‘lying’, leaves us skeptical about the presence of anything over and above a purely descriptive ingredient in the meaning of such terms. But how is it with what Williams calls “thin” ethical concepts? Take the example of ‘wicked’. This looks to be as uncontroversial an ethical expression as one could hope to find. (Unlike ‘good’, ‘bad’, etc., a ‘good’ move in chess, a ‘good’ hammer, ‘wicked’ does not appear to have any non-figurative uses outside of moral or ethical discourse.) Is there a Moore-like paradox here: “Smith is wicked, but I don’t disapprove of her”? Does ‘wicked’ behave more like ‘liar’ or more like ‘cur’, ‘dyke’, ‘male chauvinist pig’, and ‘Old Uncle Nose-up’? Again, the answer hinges on its use in unasserted contexts. Does a speaker represent herself as possessing a condemnatory sentiment towards the person to which she applies the term in saying, “If Smith is wicked, we must not allow her to be left alone with our little angel” or “Either Smith is wicked, or The Bible is not to be trusted”? If she does not, then there is nothing to this term’s meaning over and above its sense, i.e., its descriptive content. If, on the other hand, ‘wicked’ possesses as part of its meaning something over and above its sense, given the soundness of Dummett’s argument that force-indicators cannot occur within unasserted clauses of larger sentences, it follows that this additional element cannot be given in terms of force. In this circumstance, too, appeal must be made to some notion of, or particular category of, tonality. The candidates with the greatest initial plausibility are precisely those two subclasses that Dummett labels evocatives and expressives. And since we have just shown why the former is not particularly apt — for either thick or thin terms — the latter remains the best available and most promising.

Finally, then, if ethical and evaluative terms are ultimately to be assigned to a sub-category of tone, how do they fare with respect to Dummett's characterization given in terms of a "manner of speaking"? We commonly preface judgments with qualifiers, as in "*Morally speaking*, she was a good woman." Or we remark that someone's words have a moralistic tone. This may of course be simply a matter of what the speaker says, of the *content* of her utterance; but it may also be due to the particular expressions that the speaker chooses — which is to say, to their *tone*.

But which variety? Expressives function unlike other tonal varieties that can genuinely be assimilated to the general characterization, "manner of speaking" (including poetic, technical, scientific, foreign, colloquial, polite, etc.). Pejorative terms, as instances of expressives, are not stylistic, are not to be assimilated to any "manner of speaking". They are, indeed, representational, in that a speaker who uses such a term—whether assertorically or not—represents herself as possessing the relevant attitude (whether or not she actually does). And this, we urge, really ought to be understood as comprising part of what has come to be known as the *content* of the proposition or utterance. Not, however, in the narrow way of truth-conditional semantics, as determining the truth or falsity of an utterance. Not as designating, as Frege has it, that which falls within the scope of an assertion sign. The failure of the other meta-theories is due to a failure to appreciate this point. (Putative) moral language is representational in a way that cannot be captured by appeal to the Fregean notions of sense and force—whether taken singly or in combination. The descriptive and expressive can indeed be prized apart — can be separately identified. Moreover, the availability of *some* form of descriptive gloss for an expressive ingredient simply does *not* by itself entail that Frege's *Sinn* (sense) can accommodate it. It is especially in unasserted contexts where the awkwardness of an additional *assertoric* form of words becomes apparent.

The virtues of our idea are several and significant. First, appeal to the notion of tone provides the basis for an explanation of any "elusive ingredient" attached to moral terms, thick or thin. Second, it answers both to Moore's paradox and to Geach's 'Frege point'. Third, it respects the commitments — epistemological, social, and behavioral — of standardization, community, and publicity of a systematic theory of meaning within which it ultimately is situated. And finally, it promotes a broader characterization of the concept of linguistic meaning, one that remains faithful to our ordinary ways of speaking, than that afforded by the stricter structure advocated by Frege and followers, preoccupied as they are with the centrality of truth. But this is another large matter, for another leisurely day.

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Notes

1. Throughout his writings Frege variously refers to this third ingredient of meaning as *Farbung* (coloring), *Beleuchtung* (illumination or lighting), and *Duft* (fragrance or scent). Neither he nor Dummett makes any attempt to distinguish among these.

2. In *Begriffsschrift* he says that one may perceive a slight difference in sense between 'At Platea the Greeks defeated the Persians' and 'At Platea the Persians were defeated by the Greeks', a difference he attributes to the relative importance of subject or object to the interests of the speaker

or hearer (1879:§3). Although Frege here uses the word *Sinn* (translated as ‘sense’), he has yet to give it the specialized meaning by which it is later distinguished from *Bedeutung* (commonly translated as ‘reference’).

3. Frege’s claim that the two sentences possess identical sense entails the acceptability of the biconditional “‘Alfred has still not come’ is true iff Alfred has not come’. But although the reading ‘If “Alfred has still not come” is true, then Alfred has not come’ is, as Frege contends, unexceptionable, the reverse reading is not so straightforward. What are we to say about ‘If Alfred has not come, then “Alfred has still not come” is true’, in the case where Alfred’s arrival is not expected by the speaker? Something is not right with this use of ‘still’: alteration of some kind is required.

Perhaps such a misuse of ‘still’ does not license an ascription of falsity to the consequent, and thus to the biconditional as a whole. But it is not difficult to construct cases for which such a verdict is appropriate. In answer to a query, “What — you’re *still* here?”, one might legitimately reply, “No, I’m not *still* here — I went away for two hours and returned just this minute”. Stressing the adverb, the respondent contradicts the presumption that this qualification signals in the query. In such cases, the adverb falls within the scope of the assertion sign, and so contributes, on the Fregean picture, to the utterance’s sense. In other cases ‘still’ sometimes falls under what is negatable and sometimes does not: compare ‘Brown doesn’t still drink in the afternoon’ and ‘Brown still doesn’t drink in the afternoon’. To avoid the absurd conclusion that ‘still’ vacillates in meaning according to whether it straightforwardly falls within a sign for utterance-force — i.e., that it sometimes contributes a distinctive tone to utterances and at other times does not — it must be assigned a univocal, but non-truth-conditional, meaning.

Similarly with ‘already’. The inappropriateness of ‘Alfred is already here’, said at the precise moment of Alfred’s arrival, is clear; but can use of ‘already’ be faulted to such an extent that a statement containing it is reckoned false? Could it be contradicted by a counter-assertion in which ‘already’ falls within the scope of negation? By something like “What do you mean? Alfred’s not *already* here — he’s just arrived; what’s more, he’s late!”? The grammatically preferred response, employing the counterpart of ‘already’ for negative contexts, would normally be “Alfred’s not here *yet*”. However, in the case just described, when Alfred is in fact present, this statement is not only inappropriate, it is false. Again, whether or not a particular utterance containing ‘already’ can be reckoned false, the set of conditions associated with its meaning ought not vary from one context to the other.

4. For Frege, informativeness is restricted to what falls within the scope of an assertion-sign (i.e., to the sense of a sentence.)

5. See especially Blackburn’s resurrection of emotivism, which construes the additional element as an operator (e.g., ‘Boo!’, ‘Hooray!’) on *subject* terms in an ‘expressivist language’, L_{ex} (1984:190-195). These operators represent a kind of ‘commitment function’ (as contrasted with a truth-function), and take descriptions or subject terms (as contrasted with propositions) as arguments. The value of an entire ‘formula’ thus formed is to be understood as an expression of a particular attitude toward the subject or the description. We do not think it amiss to view this as a kind of ‘expressive force’, since the operators of L_{ex} function in the same way as Dummett’s force indicators (which are not present in L_{ex}). Blackburn explicitly acknowledges the challenge presented by unasserted

contexts; but it is doubtful whether his attempt to overcome this challenge is entirely successful (cf. Schueler, 1988 and Brighthouse, 1989).

6. Others have added such terms as ‘loyalty’, ‘rudeness’, ‘vanity’, ‘compassion’, ‘ignoble’, ‘brave’, ‘just’, ‘unkind’, ‘humility’, and ‘generosity’.

7. For starters, the claim that general terms such as ‘good’ and ‘ought’ are associated with no world-guided conditions whatsoever is implausible. For detailed criticisms of the thick-thin distinction see Scheffler, 1987; Quinn, 1987; Wong, 1989; and Louden, 1989. A potentially more useful alternative for classifying ethical and evaluative expressions is proposed by David Wiggins (1987). He views them as dividing into ‘valuations’ and ‘directives’ (with an “important no-man’s land” between them).

8. It might be objected here that this rephrasing does not after all provide a purely descriptive replacement for the term ‘liar’ since it includes the word ‘deceive’, which, like its nominal form ‘deceit’, might be claimed to itself belong to the class of thick ethical terms. Although this move is in order, we do not think it sufficiently strong to filibuster the entire approach: a reasonably pure descriptive replacement can be found to stand in for ‘deceive’, to wit, ‘to cause another to believe what is not true, by words, actions, etc.’. It is just that such an equivalent turns out to be rather unwieldy. In any case, the non-descriptivist position examined here concedes the existence of a distinct descriptive expression; what we wish to challenge is the idea that one but not the other possesses action-guiding associations.

9. Yet even that is not so simple. Suppose Andy and Betty consider the proposition ‘Liars are to be disapproved of’. Andy will regard it as true and, moreover, as analytic; whereas Betty will view it as false. The kinds of reasons they promote in favor of one assignment or the other will differ markedly. Both assignments, however, are complicated by the issue of an actual utterance — as to whether it is made by an Alphan or by a Betan. We will not go any further into this here, but should mention that this is one place where Williams’s discussion of the ‘ethnographic stance’ goes awry.

10. Ignoring the issue of different dialects within the same ‘parent’ language.

11. We note here an ambiguity in Blackburn’s use of ‘incorrect’. On one reading it can be taken to mean ‘inappropriate to assert’; on the other it means ‘false’ — i.e., the *content* is incorrect. Naturally, in the context of this discussion this distinction goes to the heart of the matter.

12. John McDowell (1986:383) criticizes Williams in a way that reaches a similar conclusion. The former characterizes the action-guiding component as belonging to the consequences — as opposed to the grounds associated with a concept, but suggests that both belong to its content. McDowell supposes, as do we, that Williams’s concession of truth to an utterance containing a thick term, should, on Williams’s own view, more properly be assigned to only *part* of the utterance (the world-guided part); and he concludes that,

Flawless conformity to the guidance by the world (non-ethically described) that its concept prescribes will not now, as in Williams’s account, suffice for the truth of a thick judgment; that will require in addition that the other aspect of its content be such as to

stand up to reflective scrutiny

13. Consider the inaptness of the attribution of force to various qualifiers of the attitude expressed: e.g., ‘more evil than’, ‘very evil’, etc.

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